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Citation for published version:

Robinson, L 2017, 'Practical theology in Scotland: Embracing Disinheritance', *Practical Theology*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 221-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1357326>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/1756073X.2017.1357326](https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1357326)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Practical Theology

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Practical Theology on 2/08/2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1357326>.

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Practical Theology in Scotland: Embracing Disinheritance

Abstract

In this article I will argue that disinheritance is a key theme in understanding the field of Practical Theology in the academy. To do this, I will talk about the way that the disinherited status is often placed upon Practical Theologians in the wider theological discipline. I will discuss the means by which Practical Theologians break boundaries in theological study by embracing their disinherited status as well as engaging with those who are disinherited. Finally, I will look at the way that this disinherited status influenced the importance placed upon Practical Theology in Scotland. As a result, I will connect the stories of the wider discipline of Practical Theology as disinherited with that of a uniquely Scottish story of disinherited-ness. Examples from past and present Practical Theologians in the academy will offer further insight into this connected theme for Practical Theology and Scotland.

Keywords: practical, theology, Scotland, liberation, systematic, disinherited

Introduction

‘[On the Churches of the Disinherited] Whenever Christianity has become the religion of the fortunate and cultured and has grown philosophical, abstract, formal, and ethically harmless in the process, the lower strata of society find themselves religiously expatriated by a faith which neither meets their psychological needs nor sets forth an appealing ethical ideal.’ [Niebuhr, 1929: 26]

‘Hence, knowing the rules cannot make anyone into a practical theologian, even presupposing a theological disposition. Rather, rules can serve as a guide only for the person who wants to be a practical theologian and who has the inner constitution and preparation requisite for becoming one.’ [Schleiermacher, 1830: 100]

In 1929 Richard Niebuhr published an enquiry into the idea of denominationalism. His quest was to get at the heart of why people left the established church, and why they then went on to set up their own churches outside the structure of the formal. He wanted to understand the true motivation behind such a big move from what is known, to that which is unknown. His conclusions are highlighted in the quote above. When there is a feeling of deep disinheritance by a group of people, there is a move to an alternative situation where belonging is offered. But what would cause a group of people to feel such disinheritance?

When religion is placed in the hands of academics who are disconnected from the practical situations of those who are hearing, reading, experiencing religion, it can become meaningless. Whether inside the church or in the world, there are arguments to be made that those who are studying religion should have a working understanding of the lived nature of faith, whether as an insider or an outsider of that particular faith. Niebuhr warns against the philosophical and the abstract, saying that it does not speak to those who are not trained in the art of this type of thinking. This exclusive opinion of faith creates an atmosphere where the majority feel as though they do not have a grasp on the true essence of God. This inevitably creates a disconnect, or, a feeling of being disinherited.

This article will discuss this theme of the disinherited. Niebuhr was speaking specifically about a certain ‘inherited’ or privileged status of abstract theology that was causing the modern listener to walk away from established churches. My argument throughout this article builds on this idea that Practical Theologians reside in ranks of the disinherited. That those of us who claim that we are interested in the way that faith interacts with our world and vice versa have been placed in a disinherited category within the academy.

And, as a Practical Theologian who lives and works in Scotland, I will argue that the historical development of religious belief within the Scottish context also reflects a story of disinheritance. A story that eventually provided excellent opportunities for Practical Theology to become a celebrated subject within the public universities of Scotland. The brilliant result of this shared story of disinheritance is that Practical Theology has historically thrived in this context.¹

¹ What this article does not do is to say that the focus of Practical Theology on and for the disinherited is unique to the Scottish context. It can be argued that the story of the disinherited lends itself to Practical Theology in other regions as well.

Practical Theology as a Disinherited Discipline

To explore Practical Theology as a discipline for and by the disinherited, it is important to discuss its development within the academy. Any discussion of Practical Theology as an academic discipline must start with the German Theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher. That being said, it is tempting to reside within the safe accolades of Schleiermacher and his proclamation of the importance of Practical Theology in relation to the other theological disciplines. For a practical theologian today, however, this is too easy and comfortable a situation. Schleiermacher's description of Practical Theology, and his understanding of what it entails is vital in our discipline. His view of Practical Theology as 'only for those in whom an ecclesial interest and a scientific spirit are united' (Schleiermacher, 2011: 97) is beyond affirming in our discipline. But overwhelmingly his most significant contribution to Practical Theology as a field is his belief that it is a discipline worth studying as an academic subject in higher education.

But Schleiermacher was an academic of his context, and his focus of Practical Theology resides within the confines of the church. So while we must look to his work with admiration and respect, we also must see that our discipline has outgrown some of the contextual perimeters that exist within his writings. Advocates of this post-Schleiermacher reality have tried to open the door of the academic study of Practical Theology to other forms of practice and other faiths. One such advocate of this approach is J. A. Whyte who further defines the academic concerns of Practical Theology:

'Practical theology must understand itself as the theology of practice, and as such a properly academic enquiry. The subject matter of this enquiry is not what is said, but what is done, as an expression of faith. The data for practical theology are not the verbal formulations, the ideas, the language in which people express their faith (or their unbelief), for these are the concerns of philosophical or systematic theology, but the activities, the practices, the institutions, the structures of life and of relationships

which are, or purport to be, the outcome, embodiment or expression of their faith or unbelief.' (Whyte, 1973: 229)

The opening of the research of faith to a wider context outside the church is met with its own set of criticisms. The use of the social sciences in Practical and Pastoral Theology has long been an area of contention (mostly for those outside of Practical Theology, not within). This divide of that which is the social sciences and that which is philosophical thought, and one being more appropriate in studying theology than the other, could be rooted in a very ancient understanding of truth. At a glance it appears like the Aristotle vs. Plato notion of the two-fold reality of heavenly things and earthly things. The result that we are left with in the academy today is the idea that Systematic Theologians interpret the truth or the heavenly things in a logical way, one that is based on History, Philosophy and established central doctrines, which create a means by which one can measure orthodoxy. Those who research what is happening when you introduce these dogmas into the general public are the Practical Theologians. Ours is subjective reality, and hard to recreate. Thus, we use social scientific means to capture these incarnations in the moment. Also within this realm of social scientific enquiry there is a world filled with emotions, opinions, and feelings. The ultimate enemy of logic. This move towards a purification of theology through the lens of Philosophy is a clear romanticising of one method of theological research over another. It could also be analysed as a power issue related to the white, Protestant, Western domination of what is considered correct doctrine. Which is in itself, a constant elephant in the room of any discussion such as this.

The theoretical underpinning of Practical Theology is the understanding that theology informs practice, and that theology has much to gain by studying practice. Historical (or systematic, dogmatic) theology influences practice, but it is in itself a representation of a study of practice at a given time and place. Despite the name, dogmatic theology, I argue, is

likewise contextual and evolutionary. Therefore, the task of the Practical Theologian is to build upon the past historical theological understandings of God with continued evaluation of what these doctrines have to say to a contemporary world. In addition, close research must be undertaken into what the contemporary world has to say about God in a given time or context. For as Schleiermacher scholar Terrence Tice so strongly puts forth, Schleiermacher fundamentally saw theology as 'a human enterprise. It is more than that, for it is also reflection, in Schleiermacher's context, on God's presence with humanity, especially with the church; but the human element can never be excised' (Tice, 2011. 129).

At the moment this dialogue between Practical Theologians and the other theological disciplines can oftentimes seem a one-way street. While Practical Theologians will use historical theological ideas as primary material in their works, there is the caboose-ing effect in the other direction. For example, those who see themselves as doing Systematic Theology might say that they also do Practical Theology, but that systematics come first. We are the 'and' subject. I do this *and* a little bit of that. The intellectual prioritising of theory over practice is not an issue that is unique to theology. You see it in many different professions such as nursing, engineering, and mathematics. However, it does show where Practical Theology is seen in relation to some of the other theological areas within the academy. In a 2015 article, David Grumett offered this:

'From an historical perspective, practical theology has been understood as a theological subdiscipline focused on pastoral activity rather than on classic theological sources. It is not, of course, true that pastoral concerns exclude detailed work with such sources. Nevertheless, the assumption has been widespread that a preference for practice at the very least sidelines detailed scholarly engagement with scripture, doctrine and tradition.' (Grumett, 2015: 5)

As Grumett² rightly points out, the assumption that Practical Theology is focused only on pastoral activities *rather* than engagement with theology is woefully incorrect. However, what is interesting in this quote is the idea that there is ‘widespread assumption’ that within Pastoral or Practical Theology there is a preference for practice over scholarly engagement with historical theological resources. There is an assumption here that the study of practice in some way means that there is a loss of other theological engagement. This seems to relate to the use of the social sciences in practical theological research. The use of Philosophy to understand systematics has long been seen as an appropriate way to understand theology. The social sciences, so employed by Practical Theologians, is often looked upon with suspicion. This is an example of an imagined hierarchy of christened subjects that are believed to aid theological research, and it is highly problematic.

The ‘social science’ or ‘only in the church’ argument appears at first glance a continued attempt to discredit Practical Theology methodologies in the academy, and these are arguments that have been ongoing for some time. Perhaps a newer argument is the ‘problem’ with the dialogical understanding of Practical Theologians who believe that studying humanity can be a way of understanding the nature of God. This is commonly becoming the newest issue with Practical Theology, with the assumption that this is a closeted move towards humanism. Grumett offers the following,

‘practical theology’s intra-theological dependence is problematic, however, not only because of the distorted conception of the theory-practice relation on which it rests. At least as serious is that this dependence prepares ground for its more insidious subordination to the non-theological disciplines and especially to the social sciences’ (Grumett, 2015: 12).

² This article highlights many of the historical criticisms of Practical Theology in the academy.

As I hear commentary like this I am keenly aware of a quote from Rahner: ‘Beyond the confrontation of the Church’s essence with the contemporary situation, Practical Theology should contain an element of creativity and prophecy and be engaged in critical reflection’ (Rahner, 1972: 104-5). Practical Theology *must* be engaged with the dialogue between theory and practice. It *must* employ methods and methodologies of the social sciences in order to witness and record this dialogue. It *must* use that which has been given to academics to summarise and analyse the contemporary situation in a way that is prophetic and creative. This is not subordination. These are the unashamed tools of our trade. Eric Stoddart puts it perfectly by saying, ‘It’s the fact that Practical Theologians swing both ways or, we could say, are bi-directional that sets us out as deviant in many people’s eyes. There is great security in a one-way system where doctrine determines practice. But the model of applying theology to our own lives is only safe in theory. It’s not actually how doctrine is developed.’ (Stoddart, 2014: xii)

These are clear examples of what appears to be a move towards a status of disinheritance of Practical Theology within the theological discipline in the academy. The questions, and often time deep concerns, of some of our colleagues about our reasoning and research mean that we have yet to find a perfect fit in the university. And yet, Scotland has consistently offered an overwhelmingly enthusiastic home for those of us in the field. What is it about this unique land that has opened its arms to, us, the disinherited?

Scotland’s Disinheritance

While the history of religion in Scotland is long and winding, what I hope to talk about is the way that moments of Scottish religiosity convey a wider theme of disinheritance. Despite

what is popularly seen as being a Presbyterian nation, Scotland has always been in flux when it comes to theology and spirituality, and it is this ever-evolving nature that has made it fertile ground for theologians to this day. The beginnings of Christianity in Scotland relate directly to the history of the Celtic people in the region. Though not unified in thought, some of the tenets of Celtic spirituality (which include influences on Celtic paganism and Celtic Christianity) are as follows:

1. An emphasis on a spiritual homeland;
 2. A belief that the earth and environment is sacred;
 3. A high value placed on learning and expression of learning through music and literature;
 4. Equality of women and men in the Church;
 5. Distrust of formal church structures;
 6. Focus on Christian doctrine;
 7. A high importance placed on interpersonal connections, the tribe, and the community.
 8. A feeling of being on the edge of the physical and spiritual world.
- (Power, 2006: 34-35)

Within the context of our story of the disinherited, the Celts were essentially rejected from the wider Christian community because of their beliefs that differed from the wider understanding of theology at the time. They were not rigid enough in their doctrines, and their practices were too ad hoc - too fluid. There was a belief in the sacredness of the land, specifically Scotland as a spiritual homeland. Music and literature were to be celebrated, and the equality of the men and women was a given. Perhaps most importantly, the Celts held a strong belief that the community offered a window to the sacred. A window, because the community were at the seam of the veil between the physical and spiritual world.

As Michael Lynch rightly points out, ‘The Reformation of 1559-60 is seen as the fundamental fact of Scottish history’ (Lynch, 1992: 186). As the battle between England and Scotland and Protestantism and Catholicism raged, it became increasingly clear that Scotland was set to be incorporated into a united set of nations alongside England. This would not

prove, however, to create a homogeneous state religion. In 1560, Protestantism, and specifically Presbyterianism, became the law of the land in Scotland. By the 18th century, the Presbyterian faith had taken root and was thriving in the cities of the lowlands of Scotland. Calvinism brought to Scotland many things. A structured faith based on democratic leadership and organisation, a way of understanding salvation in a systematic way, and a manner of practicing faith that was focused on the individual. It also brought to Scotland a renewed sense of the importance of academics in relation to theological training. It was not, however, universally adopted in the country. The Highlands remained Catholic in their leanings, due in great part to a lack of Gaelic speaking Kirk ministers that were placed in this region.

It was during the 18th and 19th century that the systematic removal of clans' people from this region, known as the Clearances, took place. Perhaps the greatest example of a group of the disinherited. A significant portion of the population of the Scottish Highlands were made to leave their traditional homes and lands. A form of apocalyptic Protestantism took over the Highlands as people looked to religion to explain the upheaval of their traditional society. Protestantism became the religion of the disinherited as a means of explaining their displacement and their loss. It served as a comfort that there were better things to come. Likewise, the influence of Reformation theology in this time period meant that Celtic spirituality and theology would forever remain a disinherited aspect of Scotland's religious past.

The Presbyterian church in Scotland was the centre of the spiritual and the political world for Scottish society well into the 19th century. Religion also served as the main answer to most social problems. Evangelism, and the conversion to Christianity was the key to relief from

most social woes, whether it be financial or otherwise. Callum Brown offers the following on how this belief began to change during this time period:

‘But around 1890, this hegemonic evangelical grasp of public ideology started very suddenly to slip. The tangible effects of declining churchgoing, Sunday-school attendance and Sabbath sanctity were only part of the story. They were merely elements in the greater “social question”- a complex national issue subsuming themes like the physical and moral fitness of Britain as a Christian and imperialist power, class divisions represented in the rise of trade unions and labour political parties, and the role of the state in ameliorating poverty, low wages, poor housing and industrial disputes’ (Brown, 1987: 185).

For all practical purposes the church in Scotland was losing its influence to state-ran social benefits and to the rise of the new secular community by way of labour parties and trade unions. The importance of social activism, a trait that is so very characteristic of Scottish contemporary life, was coming to the forefront of society during this time period. A strictly spiritual understanding of Christianity, that dealt with the soul but not the physical body, was increasingly of little concern to the working class. It is from this context that the rise of social theology began to emerge in Scotland. ‘In this new social theology, strikes and other social protests acquired a legitimacy not recognized by churches before...Reward in this world through social justice became emphasized, and led clergy to attack laissez faire and big business’ (Brown, 1987: 190). Church-labour parties were established, and clergy began writing theological works based on the importance of a theologically justified move towards social reform.

The emphasis on labour parties, social and economic justice, fair housing and wages, and trade unions would remain a staple of Scottish society to this day. It was in this movement and its continued success in Scotland, as well as the engagement of theologians with the aspects of social activism of this time, that serve as an important point to highlight in regards

to the space that Scotland continues to give to the engagement of theology and public life- especially in the lives of those that are viewed as disinherited or oppressed.

Despite a significant lack of numbers, Celtic Christianity and other Christian dissenting denominations within Scotland continued to serve as a tempering influence of the rigidity of Scottish Presbyterianism.³ It was this tempering, as well as the various rises and falls of interest in Celtic spirituality in Scottish history, the importance of education in the Calvinist tradition, the national priority given to theological engaged social activism and the influence of theologians like Schleiermacher that created a perfect context for Practical Theology to thrive in the Scottish academy.

Theology in the Universities of Scotland

Theology served as an important subject within the ancient universities of Scotland since their creation. By the 18th century, however, the institution of the Scottish national church was showing cracks, and nowhere was this better seen than in the confines of the university classroom. T.F. Torrance, in his work on the creation of New College at the University of Edinburgh, discusses this schism by highlighting some of the origins of the divide:

‘The eighteenth century saw a remarkable renaissance in literature, which made a considerable impact on Scottish thought. Theological questioning, counter-questioning and defensive reaction took place when traditional hyper-Calvinist structures, centring on the absolute sovereignty of God rather than on his infinite love, were under pressure from a fuller understanding of the gospel, but also from brilliant developments in the Scottish Enlightenment.’ (Torrance, 1996: 18).

³ A good example of this influence is seen in the Iona community and the way that Celtic Christianity was used by the Presbyterian leader of the community, George MacLeod. Also, Alastair McIntosh’s *Island Spirituality* (2013).

These theological differences, alongside years of turmoil regarding the appointment of ministers within the Church of Scotland, resulted in an incredible split in the national church. In 1843, 1/3 of the ministers and roughly 1/2 of the lay members split from the national church to form the Free Church of Scotland (Brown, 1996, 29). The 'Disruption', as the split in the church was called, marked for the newly established Free Church something of a second Reformation (Brown, 1996: 33). The leaders and members left their mother institution to form their own denomination, and ultimately, their own way of doing theology. Disinherited, but by their own choice. Their desire was to start anew, and they saw the creation of theological centres of education as being the means to keep their new denomination going. As a result, Glasgow College, New College (Edinburgh), and Christ's College (Aberdeen) were established as training centres for Free Church ministers. These centres would eventually be brought back into the fold of the wider university setting, but they stood for a time as independent, positively disinherited centres of study for the newly established denomination.

Prior to the Disruption, Practical Theology did not appear in the theological curriculum for ministers in any of the ancient universities. Gaining momentum in New College (Edinburgh) after the first world war, there was a move to create a space for Pastoral or Practical Theology within the theological training centres. This met with some opposition, however. In 1901, Professor W. Garden Blaikie was appointed as the lecturer on a newly formed course on Pastoral theology at New College, he wrote,

‘At that time pastoral theology was rather in disrepute. Students came from the class of logic and metaphysics permeated by the conviction that “there is nothing greater in the world but man, and there is nothing greater in man but mind.” The impression in general that the objective of the divinity hall was to cultivate the theological intellect, and that if that were done, nature would supply all the rest. It was necessary therefore, to create in the first instance, a sense of its value’ (Blaikie, 1901: 199).

The desire to make Pastoral and Practical Theology ‘inherited’ subjects was a continuing story in the history of New College. As Blaikie highlights, Pastoral Theology was seen as being something that could be taught by ministers of local congregations. Hints and tips for future ministers about funerals and baptisms would suffice. This idea of the classical subjects of theological study being primary to the education of new ministers was a struggle for those who were interested in the Schleiermacher-inspired curriculum that highlighted the importance of Pastoral and Practical Theology as a serious academic discipline. Through a slow evolution from pastoral institutes within the training colleges to chairs in Ethics and Practical Theology, Practical Theology made its way to an established area of theological study within the ancient universities. By the 1970s Practical Theology was finally considered an examinable subject at Edinburgh University.

Perhaps one of the most influential Practical Theologians at New College (Edinburgh) was Professor Duncan Forrester (1933-2016), who became Professor of Ethics and Practical Theology in 1978. Unconvinced by what he saw as the unrealistic and overly rigid organisation of these ‘inherited’ theological ideas, Forrester highlighted the fragmented nature of lived theology. He writes, ‘Both Socrates and Jesus communicated through fragments. Neither produced anything that could be called a system, or a systematic theology or philosophy. Both attended to the concrete, to particulars and above all to people, with all their complex needs, hopes and confusions’ (Forrester, 2005: 2). Forrester spoke to the theologians of the contemporary age - challenging ideas from philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre who suggested a return to some baseline moral code. Forrester says that theological and philosophical fragments are the reality of the world we live in, and that is not something to fear, but to embrace as an opportunity. Forrester’s engagement with theology transcended the academy into the world through his project the Centre for Theology and

Public Issues at Edinburgh University. CTPI became a way for theologians and religious leaders to engage in some of the most pressing social issues that face Scotland. This was done by seminars, continuing professional development, open lectures, and old fashioned activism. The centre continues to this day, addressing issues that are unique to the disinherited in Scotland.

Another key player in Practical Theology at Edinburgh University was Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-2009). A lecturer in Practical Theology and later the first female Professor at Edinburgh University, Althaus-Reid was a force of Practical Theology for the disinherited. Author of books like, *Indecent Theology* and *The Queer God*. Professor Althaus-Reid highlighted the plight of the disinherited through her work with the LGBTQ community. Relating to her native Argentina she used the Spanish phrase *desencajadas* to describe the ‘unfittingness’ of some types of theological interpretation within the academy.

‘*Teologias desencajadas*, apart from not fitting in certain structures, are also distressed theologies, for *desencajado* means out of harmony, fearful or wild. *Desencajadas* are the faces of the Other...*Desencajado* is the state in which these theological fragments are when they realize that there are no desirable possibilities to reconcile themselves with a neocolonial or global praxis, even if that cast them in a real periphery location. They are called to honest subversion.’ (Althaus-Reid, 2004: 369-70).

Althaus-Reid used the idea of honest subversive theology to bring to light voices of those who had been disinherited by religion because of their sexuality, gender, or economic status. She advocated for the personification of Jesus in the faces and stories of those who were disinherited, and she offered a version of Practical Theology that was too in touch with contemporary life to ignore.

These are but a couple of Practical Theologians who influenced the landscape of what Scottish Practical Theology is today in the academy. The following section offers further

insight into those working within the ancient universities under the banner of Practical Theology and how they uniquely embrace the understanding of theology for the disinherited by the disinherited.

Practical Theology in Scotland Today

Research in Practical Theology today is incredibly diverse. Despite this diversity, Practical Theologians within the Scottish context remain committed to the theme of theology for the disinherited and by the disinherited. The following section will highlight scholars who are undertaking research in differing areas of Practical Theology in the ancient universities of Scotland-who share this common theme.

To begin with the oldest of the ancient universities, I will highlight the work of Dr. Eric Stoddart at the University of St. Andrews. Stoddart has written excellent resources for and about Practical Theology. A former editor of the journal *Practical Theology*, Stoddart researches areas that relate to surveillance and Practical Theology. Specifically, he has investigated how surveillance is used against the oppressed to reinforce old stereotypes:

‘Already-marginalized groups are not viewed sympathetically through misrepresentation in media discourses interwoven with which are surveillance techniques that permit the monitoring of the distanced and problematic Other. Selective, surveillance data then reinforces negative one-dimensional stereotypes’ (Stoddart. 2016).

His challenge from a Practical Theology view, is to confront this type of stereotyping and to turn the idea of the all watchful eye away from manipulated cameras and towards the viewpoint of God, or Jesus on the cross. Seeing the disinherited as God might see them.

Stoddart has also written a book that further illuminates the characteristics and motivations of those who call themselves Practical Theologians. He discusses within his work, *Advancing Practical Theology: Critical Discipleship in Disturbing Times*, how we Practical Theologians understand various aspects of faith, life and academia from an insider perspective. While pointing out key areas of criticism for Practical Theology, Stoddart embraces the disinherited nature of Practical Theology in the academy. He offers the following:

‘I don’t want to claim a conversion-I’m not sure anyone starts out being a practical theologian. This process is more a coming out, acknowledging a fundamental aspect of how you’ve seen the world for quite some time. There are no guarantees as to how people who know you will react. To some, your admission comes as no surprise. Others are shocked, even feeling betrayed. One or two may be interested in how you do it. Some congratulate you on your courage, while other remonstrate with dire warnings in a well-meaning attempt to get you back to the straight and narrow.’
(Stoddart, 2014: xi)

As we move to the west, I wish to highlight the work of Professor Heather Walton at the University of Glasgow. Professor of Theology and Creative Practice, Walton has written on a variety of subjects within Practical Theology, from feminist approaches to creative writing to developing research methods specifically within the field. She has been instrumental in creating a detailed space that belongs to Practical Theology within the area of research, teaching, and the public sphere. The specific area of research that I want to highlight here is Walton’s commitment to feminist voices within the area of Practical Theology. While incorporating feminist theologians in her work, she goes further to offer empowerment to women’s voices through her collections on creative writing and reflective practice. Reflection on our practice and on our lived theology and what it says about the world around us is of key importance in Practical Theology. Accordingly, Walton writes about ways to do this type of reflection at an academic level that highlights the importance of the often lost feminine voice in theology. The voice of the disinherited, the voice of the marginalised, who are able to

speak in their own words about their own faith in the context of academia.⁴ Reflective practice, a research method that is used extensively in Practical Theology, is offered as a teachable subject via Walton et al's book, *Theological Reflection: Methods*.

Another colleague at Glasgow University, Dr. Doug Gay, Lecturer in Practical Theology. Gay is a Church of Scotland minister who is deeply involved in the religious and political side of Scottish life. His most recent book, *Honey From the Lion: Christianity and the Ethics of Nationalism* challenges the negative way that nationalism has come to be known in the 21st century. Through the use of a Practical Theology framework, Gay reclaims ideas of Scottish nationalism through the lens of an active Christian faith. There is a great deal that can be said about the idea of disinheritance and the Scottish nation in this work. Gay does well in offering an understanding of the debate of Scottish independence from an insider perspective. By giving voice to those who advocate for this change in Scotland, this work provides insights into ways people can express their feelings on nationalism in a theological way.

The University of Aberdeen, and specifically their former Professor of Practical Theology and current Professor of Divinity, John Swinton. Professor Swinton has done a great deal in moving Practical Theology into the public sphere, specifically in areas related to healthcare, disability and dementia. His writings challenge traditional understandings of the place of those with dementia and disability within the church. In both instances of dementia and disability, Swinton speaks directly to the prevailing church and pleads for them to see all people as full human beings, as creations of God. To acknowledge a group of people who increasingly left out of the prevailing life of the church. 'All theology is practical,' Swinton argues, 'and should be primarily aimed at enabling the church to participate fully in God's

⁴ An example of this work is Walton's *Not Eden: Spiritual Life Writing From this World* (2015).

mission in, to, and for the world' (Swinton, 2014: 449). Along with his work on disability and dementia, Swinton also has compiled the most comprehensive account of the research methods in Practical Theology, in his book with Dr. Harriet Mowat, *Qualitative Research Methods in Practical Theology*. By naming it as such, Swinton highlights the fact that Practical Theology is in fact its own discipline that requires its own means of researching subjects and its situations. This book has proved hugely important in the work of Practical Theology, as it shows how the use of social scientific methods advance the discipline, as opposed to divide it into some form of low level sociology. A challenge to the disinherited status of Practical Theology in the academy.

I would be remiss to not discuss briefly my own research within Practical Theology in Scotland. My own intersection of faith and life is Practical Theology and grass roots peacebuilding-expressed through the use of narrative research methods. Told by the people, and hopefully reflected in a way that is helpful to the people-giving voice to those who feel as though they have been ignored or marginalised. This research is reflected in my newest book, *Embodied Peacebuilding: Reconciliation as Practical Theology*. In a slight turn, my latest research endeavour looks at the points in Practical Theology that are not so praise worthy. We as Practical Theologians often speak of our discipline as though all practice of theology is positive, and I think this is a real limit for us. We offer research into areas of theological responses to negative things that happen in people's lives, like suffering. But how do we respond to theological practices that results in negative side effects, such as hate preaching or oppressive theological interpretation. Is this not also Practical Theology? How do our research methods and understandings change when we look at these forms of the practice of theology that harms instead of heals. How can Practical Theology be seen as an *agent* of disinheritance or oppression?

These are but a few fellow colleagues who are working on areas of study that highlight rigorous theological work that is being done in Practical Theology in Scotland. What is the connection between us? It is the way we have come to fit into the story of the disinherited in Scotland through our own status as the disinherited. The story of religion in Scotland, a combination of the Celtic legacy of the thin veil between that which is holy and that which is earthy, the rise of Schleiermacher's Practical Theology agenda in the ancient universities, the focus of the Scottish Enlightenment on the engagement of theology with social activism, and the historical commitment of theological enquiry inside the Scottish university institution (a primarily Presbyterian endeavor I would suggest). As the Celt's theology highlighted, within theological centres in Scotland, we are crossing ecclesial boundaries, creating a space for equality of students and researchers, allowing for freedom in thought about doctrines, and showing the ways that the seam between the sacred and the earth is at our fingertips. This is reflected in a myriad of different ways, but it is certainly a theme that can easily be seen in all of our works. Whether it is oppressed or disenfranchised groups, poverty, the environment or politics, the Practical Theologians in Scotland are writing about it, and not only that, they are taking their words into the street, and into the halls of Holyrood to discuss their research with communities and politicians alike. It has reclaimed Practical Theology as a discipline that has something to say to and about the world we live in. Not only *about* in an objective way, but *about* in a critical way. There is still work to be done here, but the research that we are undertaking has created an engaged space for students and researchers from different walks of life and different religious faiths to work together under the same banner of an embraced, yet challenging, disinheritance.

Conclusion

‘What we may say, however, is that the place of New College in Scottish theology and in Reformed theology has, on the whole, preserved it from what might otherwise have become a merely cerebral scholasticism, and a Calvinist scholasticism at that..If many of the most exciting developments in the Faculty in recent years have been in the field of Practical Theology, the basis for this was laid long before in the best of the traditions of Scottish theology... There is once again a lesson for us here, for in Scotland a purely cerebral theology, developed without reference to church or society, and conceived in isolation from the wider sources of theological learning and religious experience will always be on alien soil.’ (Badcock, 1996: 285)

This quote highlights the way that the story of religion in Scotland has created an ideal home for Practical Theologians. As Badcock so rightly states, theology by way of faith in action has always been a part of the Scottish academic tradition. Historically and today, scholars of Practical Theology in Scotland are researching the way that theology for and by the disinherited manifests in diverse ways. The importance of this type of research is undeniable, for as Stephen Pattison puts it:

‘I believe that theologians themselves continue to assist in the demise of theology as a subject of public significance and relevance. Too much contemporary theology seems to be a kind of whispered conversation on matters esoteric conducted in a foreign language behind closed doors in a distant attic...[Theology] has no power to transform or inform lives in a vivifying, hopeful way, much less to contribute credible analysis and principles to public debates and policies. Thus it is likely that it has no positive useful future.’ (Pattison, 2007: 212)

While this is a strong statement by Pattison, he makes a point. Are we discussing theology because we care about the way that theology is able to influence lives - the lives of the disinherited - and what these lives might say about God, or are we researching historical doctrines so we can be seen as doing ‘inherited’ theology. Even in light of Schleiermacher’s legacy, Practical theology is the disinherited child within the theological disciplines. Despite this, I believe it is the place where we can pick up the baton that Pattison describes has been dropped. It is the challenge of Practical Theologians to have their finger on the pulse of the fellow disinherited. In Scotland, Practical Theology found a common story which provided a space for our type of theological enquiry.

And perhaps the story of religion in Scotland, in all its history of feeling disinherited, yet ready to challenge the status quo whether in politics or economics, is a perfect haven for academics like us. As has been proven for many years now, Practical Theologians in Scotland are on a trajectory of a continued dialogue between theology and practice in a contextual way.

It is this dialogue, it seems, that places us in the realm of the disinherited. Practical theologians need honest academic critique, and we are open to this critique in terms of theological interpretation, qualitative methodologies, theoretical nuances, and historical inaccuracies etc. But our discipline does not need saving. We do not need to be legitimised by our theological colleagues in the academy. We absolutely ask that they walk alongside us, but we embrace our unique disinheritance. This disinheritance means that Practical Theologians are writing the new theological understandings of issues like dementia, feminism, the LGBTQ community, peacebuilding and politics. These theological engagements are systematic, based on historical understandings of theology, and they are contextual. They speak out for those who are disinherited, those who have often historically been left out of 'inherited' theological conversations. Or, as Duncan Forrester offers:

'Theology, I wish to suggest, is not some great theory of everything to which believers are expected to give their consent. Nor is it, as so many people regard it today, a pretentious story of nothing at all, or of matters so irrelevant to the life of the world that they can be safely disregarded while we get on with living and organising our societies...Clear and comprehensive understanding is not even the goal or objective of theology, although Christian theology sustains a grounded hope that at the last there will be fullness of wisdom and understanding. Meanwhile we live with and by fragments of truth and insight, making a variety of patterns, and offering important, disturbing challenging glimpses of illumination, guidance, encouragement and hope' (Forrester. 2005: 1).

It is in the patterns of fragments of truth, in the disturbing challenges, and in the hope that Practical Theologians find their place *as* and *for* the disinherited in Scotland and elsewhere. And while this holding place, being disinherited, could be seen as a negative situation, we embrace it fully. We embrace the subjective because we desire to know the place of God in the context of the world. We attempt to write about the unsystematic theology that is lived religion. And all the while we clutch our ancient and new texts - keeping an ear open to the encounters around us. It is in this place of engagement that we watch as those who have been ignored in the history of Christianity begin to emerge from the wings to tell us a story. A story of faith that no one has heard before or has long forgotten, and as we clasp hands with fellow disinherited members of the theological community, we start to tell a new story together. One that showcases lived theology. The face of God in the masses. The ones whose story may not be reflected in historical theology. And in this world of the disinherited we do not ask for a baptism of our discipline, but instead we draw together, remove our shoes on our sacred ground of Scotland, and we confidently shout '*Teologias descendajadas*' to any who will hear us.

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